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House of Representatives

KEEPING THE FAITH WITH OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN COMBAT!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Chairman, today, our nation is at war--a war that should never have been started, a war without an exit strategy, a war without allies, and a war I will continue to oppose. Congress ought to be debating these issues--now! But what is not debatable is the fact that all of us in Congress support our dedicated men and women serving in harm's way.

This bill is not perfect--and includes many very bad provisions. This hulking bill, authorizing well over half of our nation's spending every year, has often been the culprit in funding dangerous cost overruns and government spending waste.

Just like last year's Defense Authorization bill, this bill authorizes previously prohibited research on low-yield nuclear weapons. The bill also authorizes \$28 million to study the feasibility of developing a high-yield, earth penetrating nuclear weapon to destroy hardened and deeply buried targets.

Another troubling provision is the approval of the administration's request of \$10.2 billion for ballistic missile defense programs--\$1.1 billion, or 13 percent more than the current level. The total includes

funding for the initial deployment of a national missile defense system based in Alaska and California. In today's world of terrorist cells scattered around the globe, this \$10.2 billion expenditure is a wasteful boondoggle left over from another time.

There were many good provisions that the Republican Leadership would not even allow the People's House to debate and vote on. These Democratic amendments related to the war in Iraq, and dealt with important issues, such as why money is going to the Iraqi National Congress despite repeatedly bad intelligence from them, affirmations of the Geneva Convention and training requirements, support for Reserves and National Guard, and the need for greater international military support. Shutting out a full debate on these issues is a great failing of this bill.

Possibly most troubling is the lack of oversight Congress is exercising in this bill. Since the spring of 2003, Congress has appropriated more than \$166 billion for the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the last supplemental measure, the administration had been claiming additional funds would not

(over)

be needed until next year. Unbelievably, the President's FY 2005 defense authorization request, in fact, contained no money for Iraq operations.

However, the worsening situation in Iraq forced the White House last week to ask for an additional \$25 billion for operations there this year--and the Armed Services Committee authorized the funding with little discussion on the floor.

In essence, the President of the United States hasn't been honest with either the Congress or the American people about what this war is costing, and what funding he needs in the months, and potentially years, to come. The Congress missed a golden opportunity to discuss and debate the substance of the nation's deepening descent into Iraqmire.

Despite these shortcomings, the bill contains many important provisions that are essential to our soldier's serving in combat. I strongly support the 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise, special pay and bonuses for reservists and active duty personnel, and improved housing provisions. The bill also includes an authorization for additional body armor and armored Humvees, which have

been, tragically, in short supply over the last year in Iraq.

I am very happy that after many of us have struggled for years to end the Survivor Benefit Penalty, the Republican Leadership has finally relented in this bill. Democrats have worked with veterans' and military officers' organizations to press for the elimination of the social security offset under the SBP by increasing the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older from 35 percent of retired pay to 55 percent. This is a major victory for our nation's military retirees and their spouses.

In addition, this bill contains a 2-year delay of the Base Realignment and Closure process (BRAC), which I strongly support. This delay in the BRAC process is important to all of us in San Diego, and we all need to stand up to the President's desire to complete the next round of base closings as soon as possible. I hope the final bill stands up to the Presidential blustering threats of veto.

Mr. Chairman, I am supporting this bill because it keeps faith with our men and women in uniform, serving in combat halfway around the world.